



FIRE
KEEP THE SECRET.
KEEPER'S
LIVE THE LIE.
DAUGHTER
EARN YOUR TRUTH.

ANGELINE BOULLEY



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KEEPER'S
DAUGHTER

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HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY
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*For my parents, Donna and Henry Boulley Sr.
and their love of stories*

I am a frozen statue of a girl in the woods. Only my eyes move, darting from the gun to their startled expression.

Gun. Shock. Gun. Disbelief. Gun. Fear.

THA-THUM-THA-THUM-THA-THUM.

The snub-nosed revolver shakes with tiny tremors from the jittery hand aiming at my face.

I'm gonna die.

My nose twitches at a greasy sweetness. Familiar. Vanilla and mineral oil. WD-40. Someone used it to clean the gun. More scents: pine, damp moss, skunky sweat, and cat pee.

THA-THUM-THA-THUM-THA-THUM.

The jittery hand makes a hacking motion with the gun, as if wielding a machete instead. Each diagonal slice toward the ground gives me hope. Better a random target than me.

But then terror grips my heart again. The gun. Back at my face.

Mom. She won't survive my death. One bullet will kill us both.

A brave hand reaches for the gun. Fingers outstretched.

Demanding. Give it. Now.

THA-THUM-THA—

I am thinking of my mother when the blast changes everything.

PART I

.....

WAABANONG

(EAST)

IN OJIBWE TEACHINGS, ALL JOURNEYS BEGIN

IN THE EASTERN DIRECTION.





CHAPTER 1

I start my day before sunrise, throwing on running clothes and laying a pinch of semaa at the eastern base of a tree, where sunlight will touch the tobacco first. Prayers begin with offering semaa and sharing my Spirit name, Clan, and where I am from. I always add an extra name to make sure Creator knows who I am. A name that connects me to my father—because I began as a secret, and then a scandal.

I give thanks to Creator and ask for zoongidewin, because I'll need courage for what I have to do after my five-mile run. I've put it off for a week.

The sky lightens as I stretch in the driveway. My brother complains about my lengthy warm-up routine whenever he runs with me. I keep telling Levi that my longer, bigger, and therefore vastly superior muscles require more intensive preparation for peak performance. The real reason, which he would think is dorky, is that I recite the correct anatomical name for each muscle as I stretch. Not just the superficial muscles, but the deep ones too. I want an edge over the other college freshmen in my Human Anatomy class this fall.

By the time I finish my warm-up and anatomy review, the sun

peeks through the trees. One ray of light shines on my semaa offering. Niishin! *It is good.*

My first mile is always hardest. Part of me still wants to be in bed with my cat, Herri, whose purrs are the opposite of an alarm clock. But if I power through, my breathing will find its rhythm, accompanied by the swish of my heavy ponytail. My legs and arms will operate on autopilot. That's when my mind will wander into the zone, where I'm part of this world but also somewhere else, and the miles pass in a semi-alert haze.

My route takes me through campus. The prettiest view in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, is on the other side. I blow a kiss as I run past Lake State's newest dorm, Fontaine Hall, named after my grandfather on my mother's side. My grandmother Mary—I call her GrandMary—insisted I wear a dress to the dedication ceremony last summer. I was tempted to scowl in the photos but knew my defiance would hurt Mom more than it would tick off GrandMary.

I cut through the parking lot behind the student union toward the north end of campus. The bluff showcases a gorgeous panoramic view of the St. Marys River, the International Bridge into Canada, and the city of Sault Sainte Marie, Ontario. Nestled in the bend of the river east of town is my favorite place in the universe: Sugar Island.

The rising sun hides behind a low, dark cloud at the horizon beyond the island. I halt in place, awestruck. Shafts of light fan out from the cloud, as if Sugar Island is the source of the sun's rays. A cool breeze ruffles my T-shirt, giving me goose bumps in mid-August.

"Ziisabaaka Minising." I whisper in Anishinaabemowin the name for the island, which my father taught me when I was little. It sounds like a prayer. My father's family, the Firekeeper side, is as much a part of Sugar Island as its spring-fed streams and sugar maple trees.

When the cloud moves on and the sun reclaims her rays, a gust of wind propels me forward. Back to my run and to the task ahead.



Forty-five minutes later, I end my run at EverCare, a long-term care facility a few blocks from home. Today's run felt backward, peaking in the first mile and becoming progressively more difficult. I tried chasing the zone, but it was a mirage just beyond my reach.

"Mornin', Daunis," Mrs. Bonasera, the head nurse says from behind the front desk. "Mary had a good night. Your mom's already here."

Still catching my breath, I give my usual good-morning wave.

The hallway seems to lengthen with each step. I steel myself for possible responses to my announcement. In my imagined scenarios, a single furrowed brow conveys disappointment, annoyance, and the retracting of previous accolades.

Maybe I should wait until tomorrow to announce my decision.

Mrs. B. didn't need to say anything; the heavy scent of roses in the hallway announces Mom's presence. When I enter the private room, she's gently massaging rose-scented lotion on my grandmother's thin arms. A fresh bouquet of yellow roses adds to the floral saturation level.

GrandMary's been at EverCare for six weeks now and, the month before that, in the hospital. She had a stroke at my high school graduation party. Visiting every morning is part of the New Normal, which is what I call what happens when your universe is shaken so badly you can never regain the same axis as before. But you try anyway.

My grandmother's eyes connect with mine. Her left brow raises in recognition. Her right side is unable to convey anything.

"Bon matin, GrandMary." I kiss both cheeks before stepping back for her inspection.

In the Before, her scrutiny of my fashion choices bugged the crap out of me. But now? Her one-sided scowl at my oversized T-shirt feels like a perfect slap shot to the top shelf.

“See?” I playfully lift my hem to reveal yellow spandex shorts. “Not half-naked.”

Halfway through her barely perceptible eye roll, GrandMary’s gaze turns vacant. It’s like a light bulb behind her eyes that someone switches on and off arbitrarily.

“Give her a moment,” Mom says, continuing to smooth lotion onto GrandMary’s arms.

I nod and take in GrandMary’s room. The large picture window with a view of a nearby playground. The dry-erase board with the heading HELLO! MY NAME IS MARY FONTAINE, and a line for someone to fill in after MY NURSE. The line after MY GOALS is blank. The vase of roses surrounded by framed photographs. GrandMary and Grandpa Lorenzo on their wedding day. A duo frame with Mom and Uncle David as praying angels in white First Communion outfits. My senior picture fills a silver frame engraved with CLASS OF 2004.

The last picture taken of the four of us Fontaines—me, Mom, Uncle David, and GrandMary—at my final hockey game brings a walnut-sized lump to my throat. I went to sleep many nights listening to Mom and her brother laughing, playing cards, and talking in the language they had invented as children—a hybrid of French, Italian, abbreviated English, and made-up, nonsensical words. But that was before Uncle David died in April and GrandMary, grief-stricken, had an intracerebral hemorrhagic stroke two months later.

My mother doesn’t laugh in the New Normal.

She looks up. Her jade green eyes are tired and bloodshot. Instead of sleeping last night, Mom cleaned the house in a frenzy while talking to Uncle as if he were sitting on the sofa watching her dust and mop. She does this often. I wake up during those darkest hours,

when my mother confesses her loneliness and regrets to him, unaware that I am fluent in their secret language.

While I wait for my grandmother to return to herself, I retrieve a lipstick from the basket on the bedside table. GrandMary believes in greeting the day with a perfect red smile. Gliding the matte ruby over her thin lips, I remember my earlier plea for courage. To know zoon-gidewin is to face your fears with a strong heart. My hand twitches; the golden tube of lipstick a jiggling needle on a seismograph.

Mom finishes with the lotion and kisses GrandMary's forehead. I've been on the receiving end of those kisses so often that an echo of one warms my own forehead. I hope GrandMary can feel that good medicine even when the light bulb is off.

When my grandmother was in the hospital, I kept track of how many times she blinked during the same fifteen-minute window each day. Mom didn't mind my record keeping until she noticed the separate tally marks for LIGHT BULB ON and LIGHT BULB OFF. The overall number of blinks hadn't changed, but the percentage of alert ones (LIGHT BULB ON divided by total blinks) had begun to decrease. My mother got so upset when she saw my tally that I keep the blink notebook hidden in GrandMary's private room now, bringing it out only when Mom isn't here.

It happens. GrandMary blinks and her eyes brighten. LIGHT BULB ON. Just like that, her focus sharpens, and she is once again a mighty force of nature, the Fontaine matriarch.

"GrandMary," I say quickly. "I'm deferring my admission to U of M and registering for classes at Lake State. Just for freshman year." I hold my breath, anticipating her disappointment in my deviation from the Plan: Daunis Lorenza Fontaine, MD.

At first, I went along with it, hoping to make her proud. I grew up overhearing people whisper with a sort of vicious glee about the Big Scandal of Mary and Lorenzo Fontaine's Perfect Life. I pretended so

well, and for so long, that her plan became my plan. Our plan. I loved that plan. But that was in the Before.

GrandMary fixes me with a gaze as tender as my mother's kisses. Something passes between my grandmother and me. She understands why I had to alter our plan.

My nose tingles with pre-cry pinpricks from relief, sadness, or both. Maybe there's a word in Anishinaabemowin for when you find solid footing in the rubble after a tragedy.

Mom rushes around the bed, pulling me into an embrace that whooshes the air from my lungs. Her joyful sobs vibrate through me. I made my mother happy. I knew I would, but I didn't expect to feel such relief myself. She's been pushing for me not to go away to college, even encouraging Levi to pester me about it. Mom pleaded with me to fill out the Lake State admissions form back in January as a birthday gift to her. I agreed, thinking there was no way anything would come to pass. Turns out, there was a way.

A bird thuds against the window. My mother startles, releasing me from her grip. I only get three steps toward the window when the bird rises, fluttering to regain equilibrium before resuming its journey.

Gramma Pearl—my Anishinaabe nokomis on my Firekeeper side—considered a bird flying into a window a bad sign. She would rush outside, one leathered brown hand at her mouth, muttering “uh-uh-oh” at its crooked neck before calling her sisters to figure out which tragedy was just around the corner.

But GrandMary would say it was random and unfortunate. Nothing more than an unintended consequence of a clean window. *Indian superstitions are not facts, Daunis.*

My Zhaaganaash and Anishinaabe grandmothers could not have been more different. One viewed the world as its surface, while the other saw connections and teachings that run deeper than our

known world. Their push and pull on me has been a tug-of-war my entire life.

When I was seven, I spent a weekend at Gramma Pearl's tar-paper house on Sugar Island. I woke up crying with an earache, but the ferry to the mainland had shut down for the night. She had me pee in a cup, and poured it into my ear as I rested my head in her lap. Back home for Sunday dinner at GrandMary and Grandpa Lorenzo's, I excitedly shared how smart my other grandmother was. *Gramma Pearl fixed my earache with my pee!* GrandMary recoiled and, a heart-beat later, glared at my mother as if this was her fault. Something split inside me when I saw my mother's embarrassment. I learned there were times when I was expected to be a Fontaine and other times when it was safe to be a Firekeeper.

Mom returns to GrandMary, moving the cashmere blanket aside to massage lotion on a spindly, alabaster leg. She's exhausting herself looking after my grandmother. Mom is convinced she will recover. My mother has never been good at accepting unpleasant truths.

A week ago, I woke up during one of Mom's cleaning frenzies.

I've lost so much, David. And now her. When Daunis leaves, j'disparaîtraî.

She used the French word for "disappear." To fade or pass away.

Eighteen years ago, my arrival changed my mother's world. Ruined the life her parents had preordained for her. I am all she has left in this world.

Gramma Pearl always told me, *Bad things happen in threes.*

Uncle David died in April.

GrandMary had a stroke in June.

If I stay home, I can stop the third bad thing from happening. Even if it means waiting a little longer to follow the Plan.

"I should go." I kiss Mom and then GrandMary goodbye. As soon

as I leave the facility, I break into a run. I usually walk the few blocks home as a cooldown, but today I sprint until I reach my driveway. Gasping, I collapse beneath my prayer tree. Waiting for my breath to return.

Waiting for the normal part of the New Normal to begin.



CHAPTER 2

Lily's Jeep screeches into the driveway. Wearing all black as usual, my best friend hops out so I can climb into the back seat. Granny June sits in the passenger seat, headscarf tied under her chin, dark brown eyes barely peeking over the dashboard. Between tiny Lily and her great-grandmother, it's a wonder either can see the road.

Lily's been my best friend since sixth grade, when she came to live with Granny June. We look like opposites, and not just because of our height difference. I am so pale, the other Nish kids called me Ghost, and I once overheard someone refer to me as "that washed-out sister of Levi's." When Lily lived with her Zhaaganaash dad and his wife, they kept her out of the sun so her reddish-brown skin wouldn't get any darker. We both learned early on that there is an Acceptable Anishinaabe Skin Tone Continuum, and those who land on its outer edges have to put up with different versions of the same bullshit.

Lily's smile is outlined in glossy black lipstick. It grows wider as she takes in my outfit—jeans paired with one of my dad's hockey jerseys extending to mid-thigh.

"Lady Daunis in her finest gown. It's my pleasure to drive thee." She bows.

I grin, and it feels like when I slip off a backpack loaded with all my schoolbooks.

"I should sit back there. Too much work for you," Granny June says, watching as I flip the driver's seat forward and wedge my nearly six-foot-tall frame into the back. "Like seeing a baby crawl back into the womb." She says this every time we both hitch a ride with Lily.

"No way, Granny June, you're the best copilot."

You do not make an Elder accommodate you. You just don't.

We often drop Granny June at the Sault Senior Center on our way to work, depending on what's for lunch. She compares the monthly menus for the two senior-citizen lunch programs, monitoring them as closely as bingo cards during the cover-all. If Granny June thinks the Zhaaganaash are getting a better meal, she makes Lily drop her off at the Sault Senior Center downtown. Otherwise, a tribal van picks her up for the ferry ride to the Nokomis-Mishomis Elder Center on Sugar Island for lunch and social activities.

"Did ya do it?" Lily gives a knowing glance in the rearview mirror.

"Yup."

"Did ya use protection?" Granny June says. We all laugh, and as Lily turns a corner too quickly, even her tires add a squeal.

"No, Granny," Lily says. "Daunis told her ma and grandma about not going to U of M. It's official . . . Lake Superior State University, baby!" She does a high-pitched trill out the window, which startles a few tourists on the sidewalk. Lily's tried and failed to teach me how to lee-lee, which some Nish women do to call out an accomplishment.

Granny June turns to look at me and scowls. I wait for her to tell me to sit up straight. It's what GrandMary would say.

"My girl, some boats are for the river and some are for the ocean."

I think Granny June is right. I just don't know which one I am.

Lily gives me a sympathetic look in the rearview mirror. In science, a mixture has two or more components that don't join chemically. Like oil and vinegar. Lily knows it's how I feel: sad about not being in Ann Arbor, yet glad to share freshman year with her. Both feelings existing separately but swirling around together inside me.

We drive past gift shops along one side of the street. The other side follows the river, where a crowd of tourists watches a thousand-foot-long freighter pass through the Soo Locks.

I remember when we went to downtown Ann Arbor and took the campus tour last fall. GrandMary's enthusiasm contrasted with Mom's annoying questions about crime rates. Uncle David—who rarely sided against my mother—insisted that I needed to earn my degree far from home. But to me the University of Michigan meant more than just an education. It was freedom from the gossip that has surrounded me my whole life.

Daunis Fontaine? Wasn't her dad that hockey player, Levi Fire-keeper? He was one of the few Indians from Sugar Island with potential.

I remember when he knocked up Grace Fontaine. Richest, whitest girl in town.

Didn't he booze it up at a party on Sugar Island and crash his car with her in it?

What a shame when he broke his legs in the crash! Just when the scouts were coming around. Ended his hockey career.

Mary and Lorenzo sent their daughter to stay with relatives in Montreal, but when she came back with a three-month-old baby girl, Levi was married to someone else and had Levi Jr.

I heard mousy Grace stood up to her parents when they tried keeping that baby girl from Levi and all those Indian relatives.

Oh, and then there was that terrible tragedy . . .

We pass a billboard that usually advertises the Superior Shores Casino and Resort, but for the past month, the Sugar Island Ojibwe

Tribe has encouraged enrolled members to vote in today's Tribal Council election. Last night, someone graffitied it, changing one letter to make it read: VOTE! IT'S YOUR TRIBAL ERECTION.

"I'd vote for that," Granny June says. Lily and I crack up again.

Then Granny rants about how it doesn't matter who gets elected because they end up serving themselves better than any of the members.

"Now, when I die, yous gotta promise to get Tribal Council to be pallbearers at my funeral"—she pauses for dramatic effect—"so they can let me down one last time."

I laugh along with Granny June. As usual, my best friend just shakes her head.

"Teddie should've run," Lily says. "She would've cleaned up, hey?"

My aunt Teddie is the smartest person we know. She's so badass. Some rabble-rouser tribal members want Sugar Island to declare its independence from the United States. If they ever got Auntie onboard with their half-baked plan, Operation Secede might actually happen.

"Eh, Auntie says she can make a bigger impact as Tribal Health director," I say.

Granny June chimes in. "She'd never win, same as me. Teddie tells it like it is. Voters want pretty lies over ugly truths, hey?"

Lily nods, even though neither of us is eligible to vote in a tribal election because we're not enrolled.

"Too many forgot the old ways, about us being a matriarchal people," Granny June says. "Listen to me, my girls. Strong Ojibwe women are like the tide, reminding us of forces too powerful to control. Weak people fear that strength. They won't vote for a Nish kwe they fear."

Now I'm the one nodding along to my Elder's truth.

When we arrive at the Sault Senior Center, Lily does her unique method of parallel parking, pulling in nose first until she taps the rear

bumper of the car ahead. We both climb out to help Granny June. She pauses before entering the center.

"Me and Teddie got skeletons in the closet. Slept with too many of their men." Her chin juts defiantly. "Well, that and our felonies." Lily and I give each other wide-eyed looks as Granny June waves us off.

Back in the Jeep, we burst into peals of laughter.

"Holy shit," Lily says. "I know Granny June's got a past, but do you think it's true about Teddie having felonies?" She reverses into the bumper of the car parked behind us and then merges into downtown traffic.

"Auntie says all those stories about her 'youthful shenanigans' are bull."

"Speaking of shenanigans, we set for tomorrow?" Lily asks as we head toward the Tribe's satellite reservation on the mainland.

"Yes. We need to celebrate," I say, focusing on the positive part of my decision.

"You were so worked up about telling GrandMary. How'd she react?"

"She, um . . . she let me know it's okay." I am touched again by that moment between my grandmother and me, when I realized she saw the situation clearly and that she understood.

"See? You always worry for no reason," Lily says.

We reach Chimakwa Arena. There are two polling locations for today's Tribal Council election: one here at the community recreation facility and one at the Elder Center on Sugar Island. Cars already line both sides of Ice Circle Drive. Lily bumps over the curb to park on the grass.

She catches me scanning the lot for any tribal cop cars. Lily's creative parking skills always attract police attention.

"Have you seen TJ yet? Do we really gotta call him Officer Kewadin?" She shudders. "You didn't invite him to the party, did you?"

“No. I did not invite a tribal cop to our party,” I say, all peeved. “I’m not the one who gets back with my ex every other week.”

Lily eyeballs me coolly. Her mouth twitches, but she stays silent. Just as we reach the front row of cars, she slaps my back. Hard.

“Ow! What the hell!” I turn to see my best friend looking all innocent.

“What? You had a black fly on you the size of a hummingbird.” This time, she grins.

We crack up. Our laughter is as bubbly as I feel, knowing that everything will be okay.

A gauntlet of tribal members wave campaign yard signs for their favorite candidates as voters enter Chimakwa to cast their ballots. One lady perks up when we approach and offers us a plate of home-made cookies.

“They’re not enrolled,” her sidekick announces coldly.

The cookie lady sets the treats back down and impassively calls out, “Have a nice day.”

We are descendants—rather than enrolled members—of the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe. My father isn’t listed on my birth certificate, and Lily doesn’t meet the minimum blood-quantum requirement for enrollment. We still regard the Tribe as ours, even though our faces are pressed against the glass, looking in from outside.

“As if we wanted their moowin cookies,” Lily mutters, sounding exactly like Granny June.

I don’t mention how we both licked our lips at that plate.

The lobby is packed. Voters line the hallway to the volleyball-court-turned-polling-location. Parents drop off their children for the Niibing Program. The summer recreational program provides full-time childcare for kids who need supervised activities intended to tire them out, but is way more effective at exhausting us group leaders.

Just before we part ways to join our different groups, Lily nudges me.

“Later, gator.”

“After while, *Crocodylus niloticus*.”

We do our special handshake: high five for the tall girl, low five for the shorty, elbow touch, Hacky Sack foot bump, and palm forward to lock thumbs for the butterfly-flutter finale.

“Love ya, geek!” Lily always gets the last word.



CHAPTER 3

When it's time for our last activity of the day, I bring my group of nine- and ten-year-olds to the locker room to put on sweatshirts, hats, and gloves for open skate. I turn it into an Ojibwe language lesson, naming each item in Anishinaabemowin as I put it on.

"Naabikawaagan," I say, wrapping my scarf around my neck as we step onto the ice.

"Hey, Bubble!" Levi shouts my least favorite nickname across the rink.

On Friday afternoons, the Sault Ste. Marie Superiors skate with the kids. The Supes are an elite Junior A league team, a stepping-stone for guys hoping to play at the college or professional level. GrandMary refers to the Supes as a "finishing school" for hockey players.

My younger brother, who will be a high school senior, was made team captain in only his second year on the team. In Michigan's Upper Peninsula, the Supes are regarded as hockey gods—which makes Levi like Zeus, possessing something special that transcends even natural talent and hard work.

We look nothing alike. I'm the spitting image of our father. But where Dad's facial features were proportional to his large frame, mine are like caricatures. Levi resembles his mom, right down to the dimples, bronze skin, and long eyelashes. Dad was a hockey god, so Levi lucked out there, too. Plus, my brother can be charming, especially when he wants something.

Levi and one of the new Supes are skating with the five- and six-year-olds, which include my six-year-old cousins Perry and Pauline.

"Auntie Daunis!"

I love when my twin cousins call me "Auntie." I ditch my group and skate over to them.

"Auntie, did you know today is Friday the thirteenth?" Pauline sounds like a teacher.

"Uncle Levi says bad luck is just made-up horseshit," Perry chimes in.

I imitate Pauline's schoolmarm tone. "Levi, did you know that responsible aunts and uncles don't swear around young, impressionable minds?" The Supe next to Levi snickers. "See, New Guy knows what I'm saying."

"It's Jamie," New Guy says. "Jamie Johnson."

"Eh. Let's see what you bring to the team before I learn your name," I say.

OutKast's "Hey Ya!" blasts over the rink sound system as I take off my extra-long scarf. Perry and Pauline latch on to the ends, and I pull the twins around the rink.

Dad used to do this with Levi and me—a kid on each end, with the middle of the scarf around his waist like a harness. My dad's scarf was jade green, the same color as Mom's eyes. Perry pleads to go faster. That girl is happiest on warp speed, with her long blue-black hair fanning behind her like jet vapor condensation trails. Impulsively, I double back to Levi, digging in my hockey skates for

four quick lateral pushes. Enough to make Perry squeal but not get Pauline rushed out.

Just before I reach my brother, I halt with a quarter turn. My hockey blades shear the ice. The shavings hit Levi and New Guy. I flash a grin as they jump back a second too late. Levi is amused, but New Guy's jaw drops with something like shock and awe.

I check the twins' trajectory. Perry tries mimicking my stop. She falls over but pops right back up. Pauline keeps going until she bounces off the dasher board and lands on her back. I'm certain she's okay, but I skate over anyway. New Guy follows me.

When I reach her, Pauline looks up at me, breaking into a jack-o'-lantern grin. Her beautiful face is the darkest amber—a perfect and precious deep golden brown. She flaps her mittens at me.

"Pick me up!" she pleads.

I remember how, as a kid, I once fell hard, my helmet smacking the ice. Dad was at my side in an instant, deep voice booming, *N'Daunis, bazigonjisen!* I scrambled to stand while my eyes saw stars. *That's my girl!*

Whenever I fall, my dad's voice is the thunder following the crack of lightning, telling me to get back up.

"Eh, you're fine," I say.

She squeals with delight when New Guy helps her up.

"You should've let her lie there like a slug till she freezes," I tell him. I try not to smile when he spins Pauline on the ice and laughs along with her. People are watching and I'm not giving the gossips anything to comment on.

I look around for Lily. She's surrounded by preschoolers inching forward with their colorful plastic skate helpers. She makes eye contact, as well as a lewd gesture with her hand and tongue. Clearly, Lily agrees with everyone who's been yammering nonstop about the new Supe since the team for the 2004–2005 season was announced a week ago.

Jamie Johnson is crazy hot.

Jamie Johnson's scar makes him look mysterious.

Isn't it too bad that Jamie Johnson has a girlfriend back home? Yeah, that won't last.

And, worst of all . . .

Hey, Daunis, can you ask Levi to assign me as Jamie Johnson's Supe ambassador?

I sneak a glance at him. Empirically speaking, I suppose Jamie is good-looking. He's got huge dark eyes and dark brown hair long enough for curls to go in different directions. I'm more interested in the scar that runs from the outer edge of his right eyebrow to his jawbone. I study it. It doesn't have the plump overgrowth of a keloid, so that makes it a hypertrophic scar.

"Levi told me about you. You're headed to the University of Michigan," Jamie says, watching the twins skate back to their group leader.

"Oh, I . . . um . . . change of plans." I meet Levi's eyes as he joins us. "I'm gonna go to Lake State. My mom needs me." I clear my throat. "You know . . . with everything going on."

I don't mention Gramma Pearl's warning about bad things happening in threes.

"You're staying?" Levi shouts. "Woo-hooooo!" My brother picks me up and spins me until I'm nauseous. I whack at his back, laughing. His happiness is kind of contagious.

Levi sets me down. "Now we've got something to celebrate this weekend. Party at the big house tomorrow at eight, right? Beer will be ice cold."

"Lily and I will be there."

Still cheering, Levi skates away like the Pied Piper, leading a line of kids who imitate his footwork.

"So, you're sticking around." Jamie's smile extends to his eyes, and the last traces of nausea somersault in my stomach.

Nonempirically speaking, Jamie Johnson is hot when his eyes sparkle like that.

He keeps talking. "I wish you were gonna be a senior too. But, hey, at least you get to miss out on my uncle Ron as your science teacher."

I nod even as my nose stings with familiar tingles, which I force away with a clenched jaw.

"Is that a bad thing?" Jamie's voice deepens slightly with concern.

"No. It's just . . . Your uncle is filling my uncle's job at Sault High." The image of Uncle David adjusting the gas flame of a Bunsen burner triggers a tidal wave of sadness. And fury.

Jamie waits for me to say more.

"He died a few months ago. It was awful." I correct myself. "It's still awful."

When someone dies, everything about them becomes past tense. Except for the grief. Grief stays in the present.

It's even worse when you're angry at the person. Not just for dying. But for how.

My mother fainted when she heard the news about Uncle David. Later, when the police provided details, she insisted he had been sober for over thirteen years. Not a drop of alcohol since the day Mom returned from the library on campus and found five-year-old me on the sofa reading books to my passed-out uncle. She was adamant that her brother had never used other substances. Ever.

"I'm very sorry, Daunis."

My name sounds different in his almost-husky voice of concern. He stretches my name, so it sounds like *Dawww-ness*, rather than the way my Firekeeper relatives say it: *Dah-niss*.

Lily calls my name and points with her lips toward the dashers, where Teddie is waiting. My aunt motions for me. I skate over, a bit surprised when Jamie follows.

"Hey, I came here to vote and pick up the girls, but now there's

a thing at work." Auntie notices Jamie. "Hi, I'm Teddie Firekeeper. You must be the new Supe everyone is talking about. It's a big deal whenever another Native player makes the team. Where are you from?"

"Jamie Johnson, ma'am." He offers his hand. "From all over. We moved a lot."

Auntie looks respectable, in a pantsuit with a gorgeous, beaded floral medallion. But, there's still the echo of the girl who would've throat-punched you for calling her Theodora.

"I meant which tribe," she clarifies.

"Cherokee, ma'am. But I didn't grow up around any family."

I glance at Jamie. I cannot fathom growing up without relatives. I have so many family members, not all blood-related, who have surrounded me my entire life. Plus a lot of matriarchs and mini-matriarchs-in-training.

"You need me to keep the girls awhile, Auntie?"

"Can you?" She sounds relieved. "Gotta go back to work. T-shirts came in for next week's immunization fair, and they have an owl saying, 'Be wise. Immunize!'" Auntie shakes her head. "No one caught it before ordering three hundred shirts, hey?"

"Holy." Lily skates over in time to add her succinct opinion.

"What's the problem?" Jamie directs the question to me, confused. Either Cherokees have different teachings about owls or else Jamie doesn't know his culture.

"In Ojibwe culture, the owl is a companion for crossing over when you die," I explain. "Not exactly the ambassador you want telling Nish parents to immunize their babies."

Auntie adds, "Not everyone knows their teachings. So I'm meeting the community health worker and her supervisor back at the office so we can rush-order new shirts."

"On a Friday night?" Lily's both appalled and impressed.

"Well, it's a problem they helped create, so they need to be part of the solution." Auntie calls to the twins in Anishinaabemowin. "Aambe, jiimshin." They hurry over for kisses and hugs.

After their mother leaves, Pauline asks Jamie to lift her up. He does, and she poses like it's their Olympic performance. I admire how he holds her with perfect technique, which I recognize from the years of figure-skating lessons I endured in exchange for GrandMary letting me play hockey as well. I wonder how long Jamie trained as a pairs figure skater before he switched to hockey?

Lily catches me watching him.

"I'd say it's too bad the new Supe has a girlfriend, but I know you don't date hockey players because of your miizii Hockey World rules." She sounds almost mad about it.

"Yup. Gotta keep Hockey World separate from Regular World." On the ice, I know the rules. But off the ice, the rules are always changing. My life goes more smoothly when Hockey World and Regular World don't overlap. Same with my Fontaine and Firekeeper worlds.

"But the good stuff happens when worlds collide . . . osmosis combustion," Lily says.

I grin. "You're thinking of collision theory. When two things collide and exchange energy if the reacting particles have enough kinetic energy."

"Oh yeah. How could I have gotten them confused?" She laughs. "But seriously, though, your rules are so black-and-white. Why can't you just—"

"Lily?" A voice calls out. We both turn, and I freeze when I see Lily's ex-boyfriend standing near the dasher door a few feet away. I tense at his familiar, hopeful smile, then look to Lily for my cue on how to react.

Back in the sixth grade, we were in the cafeteria when Lily first heard sweet, dorky Travis Flint burp the alphabet. She laughed so

hard that she snotted milk from her nose. It was the best reaction he'd ever gotten; Travis instantly fell for Lily. When he grew up, in high school, revealing chiseled cheekbones and a square jaw, girls suddenly noticed the class clown was beyond handsome. Travis was radiant, especially when making Lily laugh.

That all changed back in December, halfway through our senior year.

I watch Lily closely. If she talks to Travis, I'll have to brace myself for another episode in *The Lily and Travis Saga*. It's a show that keeps getting renewed even though they repeat the same storyline.

Fortunately, she skates away, clearly uninterested in speaking with him. Travis isn't wearing skates, but I block the half door opening to the ice anyway, channeling every inch and pound of my body into becoming an impenetrable wall. Every hockey team needs a goon, someone to start shit or avenge wrongdoing. I am Lily's goon.

"Aw, Dauny, don't be like that." The hollows under his cheekbones are concave to the point of sickly. Any softness is gone. He seems like a shell of the funny boy who once made me laugh so hard that I peed my pants a little. "I swear I'm clean. Just wanna talk to her."

"Not gonna happen, Trav." I put my hands on my hips to become even wider.

"I'm clean," he repeats. "I'm staying clean for her."

"I know," I say. I believe he truly means it, but that doesn't mean it's a good idea for him to be near Lily. I usually call guys on their crap, but the sincerity in his voice almost makes me want to hug him. It's different from the typical Guy Lies.

Guy Lies are the things guys declare in the heat of the moment, which fade with time and distance. I've heard quite a few Guy Lies thanks to TJ Kewadin, the Sugar Island Ojibwe Tribe's newest cop. *I can't stop thinking about you. Or U of M is only two hours from Central, we can make that work. And my personal favorite? I love you.*

Travis is not lying when his anguished voice cracks. "I just miss her so much. I'll do anything to get her back."

"I know you'll do anything. That's why I'm going all goon on you." Lily told me what he did: *C'mon, Lily-bit. It's a love medicine. It'll make our relationship stronger. Try it for me.*

"Trav, maybe you should stay clean for yourself. Go to ceremonies. Get healthy."

Travis's eyes brighten, and for an instant I remember how funny and beautiful he used to be. He was my favorite of Levi's friends. We took nearly every Advanced Placement science class together. Travis Flint was my friend, too.

"That'll do it, won't it, Dauny?" he says excitedly, turning as if to run for the nearest sweat lodge. "I'll promise to go to Traditional Medicine. See the healer."

"Get healthy for you. Not for her!" I shout at his back.

As I watch Travis run off, I feel unsettled. I quickly skate around the perimeter, looking for Lily. She can always use a hug after a Travis encounter. I'll listen to what she says, and doesn't say, and support whatever she decides.

I really don't like *The Lily and Travis Saga*. I only watch because my best friend stars in it and she needs my protection. And my support. After all, goons get called upon to do what other players can't or won't.

I've seen Travis in bad shape before, but this felt different. He looked desperate, like he wants to do the right thing but for the wrong reasons. I resolve to keep an eye on Travis to make sure he stays far away from Lily until he's doing better. I'm worried that Lily may be in danger of more than a broken heart.